



## Professional Report Series – Number 8

### *Toward A Second Century Of Excellence For The National Park System*

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#### **Abstract**

As the National Park Service nears the beginning of its second century, it is important to reemphasize that the parks, and all they represent, have evolved from units of a respected national system into the combined expression of our most valuable and inalienable national heritage. They are the unchanging measures of a rapidly changing world, repositories of information against which human progress or its opposite can be gauged, touchstones of who we are as a people and even as members of the human species. They are the best hope for preserving the cultural record that defines American civilization and significant components of global biological diversity upon which life itself depends. In this paper, The Coalition of National Park Service Retirees:

- Presents a ten-point vision of the attributes that the National Park Service will have by the time its centennial arrives on August 25, 2016
- Outlines nine qualities that must be sought and fostered in its leaders for it to retain its integrity, serve the public and meet its goals.
- Identifies five core values that must underlie “principled leadership.”

#### **The Coalition**

The Coalition of National Park Service Retirees (CNPSR) is an organization comprised of nearly 700 former National Park Service employees who, collectively, have served almost 20,000 years within the agency in every capacity and at all grades, including former Directors and Deputy Directors, former regional Directors or Deputy Regional Directors, former Associate or Assistant Directors at the national or regional office level, former Division Chiefs at the national or regional office level, and former Superintendents or Assistant Superintendents.

In our personal lives, we come from the broad spectrum of political affiliations. As park managers, rangers and employees in the National Park Service’s many disciplines, however, we devoted our professional lives to a common goal – maintaining and protecting our national parks for the benefit of all Americans, both living and those yet to be born. We remain committed to that goal.

This paper is one of a series on critical issues facing the National Park Service as it enters its second century. A complete listing of all current or planned papers appears at the end of this report.

#### **The Author**

The paper was prepared for and with the concurrence of CNPSR by Rob Arnberger, a 34-year veteran of the National Park Service who retired in August 2003. He served at 10 different parks and in one regional office in a wide variety of positions. He ended his career as regional director for Alaska Region, where he supervised the superintendents of 16 national park units encompassing 54.7 million acres, or about two-thirds of the entire acreage of the national park system.

## **Professional Report Series – Number 8**

### ***Toward A Second Century Of Excellence For The National Park System***

#### **Preamble**

As the National Park Service nears the beginning of its second century, it is important to reemphasize that the parks, and all they represent, have evolved from units of a respected national system into the combined expression of our most valuable and inalienable national heritage. They are the unchanging measures of a rapidly changing world, repositories of information against which human progress or its opposite can be gauged, touchstones of who we are as a people and even as members of the human species. They are the best hope for preserving the cultural record that defines American civilization and significant components of global biological diversity upon which life itself depends.

At a crucial time in our country's history, when candidates for President of the United States, and for other elected offices, vie for American's votes, it is appropriate to deeply explore the visions and statements these candidates present to the electorate. Moreover, it is appropriate that candidates be challenged by those they seek to represent with visions and issues of consequence that bear upon the very future of the American nation.

It is in this spirit that the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees declares its vision of a second century National Park Service and National Park System. It is this vision that guides our organization in considering the merits of all candidates for national office and the platforms of their political parties. We hope this vision for the future, including the necessity for inspired principled leadership at all levels, will resonate both with candidates and their parties and with the citizens they hope to represent. As it pertains to our National Park System, this election may decide whether to retain the benefits of victories painfully won over decades or to risk losing them to narrow, short-term, and private or commercial interests and candidate apathy.

#### **Vision Of The National Park Service In 2016**

We believe that the National Park Service of 2016 will be an agency that:

1. Preserves and enables visitors to enjoy the truly special places of our common heritage—the inalienable heritage—of our nation, without confusion about its mission.
2. Is deeply involved with the American people in what it means to be American and with the people of the world about what it means to be human.
3. Is viewed by the public and government officials not as a “land management agency” but as an agency that manages ideas and ideals.
4. Educates visitors through deeply personal experiences of profoundly important places.
5. Is managed as a coherent system rather than as independent areas and programs.
6. Is driven by a current and constantly-renewed vision, nationally and in each individual park.
7. Leads, encourages, and assists all others in our country who pursue similar goals, and, on behalf of the United States, assists all others in the world who pursue similar goals.
8. Is free of burdens that impede accomplishment of its mission, and has leadership that is free of inappropriate constraints and conflicting goals.

9. Is well-funded, well-staffed, sophisticated, professional, value-driven, motivated, innovative, daring, and excellent, within a context of long-term continuity.
10. Provides education, training, and career opportunities that maximize fulfillment of the professional potential of each employee.

### **Principled Leadership As A Key To Attaining This Vision**

The National Park Service must restore its vigor as an agency composed of principled experts who manage priceless elements of this nation's natural and cultural heritage. It must create a renaissance of inspired national leadership within the agency on behalf of the citizens of this nation who count on it to manage their national legacy. It will attain this goal when:

1. Leaders uncompromisingly defend the mission of the National Park Service, recognizing that they are non-partisan principled experts and professionals shouldering the expectation of the American public for honesty, integrity and candor.
2. Leaders recognize that the National Park Service is the guardian of places that embody irreplaceable events and ideas that define the nation's character, places that deserve the highest levels of reverence and protection. Leaders will therefore make affirmative, principled, factual arguments that call attention to what the nation cannot afford to lose—the heritage it has placed in trust for future generations.
3. The National Park Service, as a direct result of constructive civic engagement, defends the public's right to know the truth about its National Park System—communicating facts and perspective on how the National Park System is to be managed to its employees, to the Congress, to the Department of the Interior, and, through the media, to the public.
4. The National Park Service acts to assure that all parties involved understand and act on the premise that appropriate management of the National Park System must be carried out in a nonpartisan way and that managers must place the national interest above political, local and other special interests. Success means that responsible officials of the National Park Service, the Department of the Interior, and the Congress respect and properly execute the NPS mission, including all applicable legislation, court decisions and appropriately developed policies. They further respect and build upon the decisions of past and current generations regarding the composition of the National Park System and the standards of care for the System.
5. Leaders exercise the courage to resist the tendency to compromise long-term benefits in favor of short-term political expediency, whim or special interests.
6. Leaders recognize, stimulate, and cultivate understanding of and reverence for the inherent values and purposes for which each unit of the National Park System was established, as well as for the system as a whole. They further recognize that this understanding and reverence should form the fundamental rationale for defining the quality of experiences provided to visitors and the relevant education of the public.
7. Leaders recognize and support the role of science and scholarship in guiding decisions and actions affecting the mission, integrity and future of the National Park System and its resources.
8. Leaders respect and develop the experience and wisdom of career professionals in the National Park Service and encourage, value and give appropriate consideration to their contributions.

9. Leaders recognize that the National Park System constitutes an inalienable patrimony belonging to the nation's present and future citizens as a whole, that the programs and activities associated with the parks extend their benefits throughout the public and private sectors and to the people of all nations, and that any risk resulting from commercialization or privatization of the national patrimony held in the public estate is unacceptable.

### **Principled Leadership Predicated On Core Values**

We believe that five core values are necessary to attain the above:

1. **Shared Stewardship:** Sharing a commitment to resource stewardship with the global preservation community.
2. **Excellence:** Striving to continually learn and improve so that the highest ideals of public service and be achieved.
3. **Integrity:** Dealing honestly and fairly with the public and the employees.
4. **Tradition:** Pride in tradition fosters understanding while still not bound by it.
5. **Respect:** Embracing differences as a pathway to learning and the enrichment of everyone.

These five core values by themselves, however, are not enough. When coupled with professionalism from principled experts, fidelity to the key pieces of legislation that define and prescribe agency mission, compliance with well considered management policies and a deep belief in and appreciation for the agency mission and traditions, they contribute to inspired principled leadership.

The Coalition of National Park Service Retirees believes that the lack of – or failure to – faithfully exercise principled and inspired management and principled leadership is the single greatest threat to our park system. It is a threat of cumulative mediocrity that the National Park Service has had forced upon it and must form the basis for change for the future.

## **This Series Of Papers**

The imminent arrival of the centennial of the National Park Service's birth, which will occur in 2016, has led to reflection on its past, evaluation of its successes and failures, and discussion of its future goals and priorities – both within the agency and among its many friends and supporters.

As an organization containing more professional experience and knowledge than any comparable entity anywhere in the country, we believe that we are uniquely placed to offer our professional perspectives on the array of issues that are and will be discussed over coming months and years.

This series of papers offers our professional evaluation of the key issues that the agency is now facing or will be dealing with in coming years. Current papers in the series, either completed or in development, include the following. Others may be added:

- Report 1        *America's Crown Jewels: The National Park System* – A paper on the philosophic and legislative foundation of the NPS and an evaluation of the need for more effective national engagement in protecting parks.
  
- Report 2        *The National Parks Centennial Commission* – An evaluation of the commission and recommendations on how it should work, what its goals should be, and what issues it should focus on.
  
- Report 3        *The National Park Centennial Institute* – A paper that explores the need and concept for a formalized academic institute to study a wide variety of park-related issues in order to inform and educate agency staff and political leaders and better manage our parks in a new century.
  
- Report 4        *Competitive Sourcing, Privatization, and Philanthropy in our National Parks* – A paper on these key issues and the bearing they have on the agency and its efforts to attain its goals.
  
- Report 5        *The Future of Entrance Fees and Their Connection to Visitation* – An examination of the problem of over reliance on entrance and user fees and the potential fees have to “price publics out of their parks.”
  
- Report 6        *Reasserting International Environmental and Park Leadership* – This paper looks at the reasons why the NPS has lost its standing as an international leader in parks and what needs to be done to become a more effective member of the international parks community.
  
- Report 7        *A Renaissance of Park Interpretation and Education Reaffirms the Mission of the National Park Service* – A paper that looks at the present dire straits of the NPS interpretive and education program and calls for a “renaissance” and a renewal of excellence in our on-site and off-site educational programs.
  
- Report 8        *Toward A Second Century Of Excellence For The National Park System* – This paper presents a ten-point vision of the attributes that the National Park Service needs to have by the time its centennial arrives on August 25, 2016. It also outlines qualities that must be sought and fostered in its leaders for it to retain its integrity, serve the public and meet its goals, and identifies core values that underlie “principled leadership.”

- Report 9 *It Is Not A Matter Of Money – It Is A Matter of Priorities* – This paper exposes the budgetary quagmire the National Park Service finds itself in and discusses ways out of the situation. It also presents a 15 year review and analysis of NPS budgets and compares the Clinton and Bush administration’s budgets.
- Report 10 *The Renewal of the Park Ranger Profession* – A review of the present state of the park ranger profession, which is increasingly called upon to specialize in the narrow niche of law enforcement, and how it might be reformed to better serve the agency in the future.
- Report 11 *Global Climate Change Creates New Park Environments and New Organizational Challenges for Park Science Programs* – This paper looks at the coming changes to our national and global ecosystems and impacts upon society and where our national parks can serve as effective barometers of global change.
- Report 12 *Reassessing the Development Footprint in our Parks* – This paper looks at the planning, development and construction process in the parks, examining the lessons learned from the first century of park development and how they need to be reconsidered for the second century.